

THE GULL



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 102 NO. 3 FALL 2018

SHOREBIRDS ARE MARATHONERS

BY RUSTY SCALF

It'd be so easy to take them for granted. Winter shorebirds just seem so abundant. Sandpipers swarm in protean clouds over mudflats; troops of Avocets scythe the biofilm like medieval farmers harvesting wheat; plovers dart to and fro with laser focus; thousands of diverse shorebirds form somnolent gatherings at high tide. Our lucky eyes see so much, so often, that it's difficult to retain perspective on these riches; difficult, because our experience in San Francisco Bay is unique.

CONTINUED on page 5

Shoreline birds at sunset
Rick Lewis





Sandpipers at Elsie Roemer.

LESSONS FROM OUR PEEPS

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In this issue, you'll rediscover an important reason why Golden Gate Audubon is passionate about striving to educate and engage the people of our local communities in bird conservation.

Our metro area hosts significant proportions of the entire hemisphere's population of multiple bird species. We can't afford to be slackers when it comes to protecting habitats, especially not habitats that so many shorebirds, waterfowl, and songbirds need for their survival. Our local birds include nearly 500 species, who rely on

the Bay Area as a breeding, wintering, or migratory staging area. With an estimated 250 species migrating in, out, or through, it's incumbent on our region to ensure they have sufficient opportunities to refuel—and to rest—while they linger in a metro area landscape that's human-dominated.

Golden Gate Audubon helps in several ways. Each month we offer public habitat restoration days at 8 different sites on the Bay (we provide habitat workdays for private groups, too). In this past year, our agency marshaled more than 2,300 vol-

unteers to clean up shorelines, remove non-native vegetation, and place native plants that sustain resident and migratory wildlife species.

GGAS maintains three distinct conservation committees: San Francisco Conservation Committee (SFCC), East Bay Conservation Committee (EBCC), and the Friends of Alameda Wildlife Reserve Committee (FAWR). These devoted volunteers help GGAS address threats to birds, by analyzing challenges, speaking up, drafting science-based comments, and formulating feasible recommendations, which will protect birds and their habitats even as our cities grow and our climate changes.

When I think of a peep flying from Arctic tundra to Tierra del Fuego, I marvel at the individual bird's finesse and fortitude. Then, I remember that those capable of going the greatest distances almost never journey alone. They are buoyed by the presence of a flock—a team—that adjusts perpetually to changing conditions while staying on course.

GGAS is not unlike such a flock. We've been going strong for 100+ years, enduring tenaciously in the face of ever-changing political climates, persevering in our mission, even as the landscape perpetually shifts and is reshaped beneath us.

The smallest of avian migrants puts all Olympian achievements to shame. Sandpipers embody astounding grit, adaptation, determination, and grace. Finely tuned to our planet's seasons, they navigate by distant stars with their biology in rhythm with each tide's ebb and flow. Yet, to endure, they remain sociable and work with others...just like our flock at GGAS.

NEWS BRIEFS

Early Bird Membership Renewal

Renew your Golden Gate Audubon Society membership for 2019. Renew or join online at goldengateaudubon.org/join. If you join now your membership will cover the rest of 2018 and all of 2019. If you're a member of National Audubon who has not yet joined GGAS, please do! GGAS receives no portion of your National Audubon membership dues.

Travel with GGAS

See the birds of the world with us! Do you want to expand your life list while experiencing a different environment or culture? If so, we hope you'll consider a guided trip through GGAS. Upcoming destinations include Botswana, Iceland, Oaxaca, Montana, and more! We offer trips for every budget and birding level. More details are available online at goldengateaudubon/travel.

GGAS 2019 Photo Calendar

2019 Birds of the Bay Area calendar now on sale. Don't miss this chance to enjoy the stunning photos of some of the Bay Area's best photographers. Perfect for your home or office wall. Also great as holiday, birthday or host/hostess thank you gift. Order online at goldengateaudubon.org/calendar or come by our office and save the shipping.



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. REGIONAL SHORELINE: BIRDING HOT SPOT

BY SHAROL NELSON-EMBRY

LOCATION

Doolittle Dr.
& Swan Way
Oakland

MLK
*Shoreline
birding is
best fall
through
spring.*

Endangered Ridgway's Rail to Burrowing Owls, MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline birding is best fall through spring. During the cooler months migrating and overwintering waterfowl and shorebirds converge in its habitats, along with the resident avian species. This East Bay Regional Park in Oakland, attracts over 189 species of birds.

MLK Shoreline has four habitats, each attracting its own cadre of birds: salt marsh, open bay, seasonal wetlands, and landscaped turf and trees. An accessible seven miles of flat, paved trails surrounds the bay. Here's a snapshot of species found in each habitat type.

Sea ducks, Brown Pelicans, four species of grebes, and three species of terns ply the deeper waters of the bay where benthic habitat composed of eel grass beds, oyster beds, and mudflats allow fish to thrive. Rafts of Ruddy Ducks, Greater and Lesser Scaup, and Surf Scoter, along with plentiful gulls rest on the water.

Seasonal wetlands appear at the southern edge of the

New Marsh and near the Park Headquarters parking lot after the rains start. The wetlands attract dabbling ducks such as American Widgeon, graceful Northern Pintail, Northern Shovelers, Gadwall, and three species of teal. It's "butts up" for everyone as they search for algae and plant roots in the muck. Strutting along the edge, resident Black-necked Stilt, American Avocets, Snowy and Greater Egrets, and overwintering shorebirds hunt or rest in the shallows.

Arrowhead Marsh is a vital remnant salt marsh habitat. San Francisco Bay shorelines were once thick with salt marshes. But 90% of historic marshlands were lost by the mid-1900s. Restoration efforts over the last 20 years by GGAS volunteers has helped this habitat and the animals that rely on it. The endangered Ridgway's Rail, makes its home here. Their clattering calls echo from the New Marsh to Arrowhead Marsh during mating season. Don't miss the Burrowing Owl habitat near the access road off Swann Way in the New Marsh. The New Marsh only exists because of the efforts by GGAS and other environmental advocates in preventing development of this area. Eco-education classes led by GGAS staff and volunteers have created new bonds between the students from under-resourced schools, their families in the neighborhood, and the birds in the park: empowering future advocates for preserving these important natural places.

Even the ubiquitous Canada geese are joined by the Snow Goose, Cackling Goose, and Greater-white Fronted Goose species on the landscaped turf areas. Check eBird to see recent sightings and enjoy a wonderful walk!



(From left) Damon Slough at MLK Shoreline by Verne Nelson; Ridgway's Rail by Jerry Ting.

Read more about this and other birding hotspots at goldengateaudubon.org/hotspots.

YEAR OF THE BIRD AND BEYOND

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). To commemorate this milestone, GGAS joined other conservation organizations to inspire everyone to take actions to improve our world for birds. It's an important time to consider some of the ways that we can all help our feathered friends.

Lights Out for Fall Migration – Every fall more than 250 species of birds move through the Bay Area. Many species navigate at night, using the moon and stars as guides, so bright lights can easily disorient birds. Lights can also draw birds off course and into a collision with buildings or rooftop structures. In some cases, birds may circle lighted buildings—trying to get reoriented—until they drop from exhaustion. We can save the lives of birds. It's as simple as turning off unnecessary lights or closing window coverings from dusk to dawn, August 15 – November 30.

Plan a Bird Friendly Garden – Did you know that you can turn your yard into a haven for native birds? By placing an appropriate assortment of native plants, you'll create a drought-resistant landscape that becomes a welcoming sustainable habitat for birds. GGAS's brochure, *Inviting Wildlife into Your Backyard*, can get you started. There are editions for San Francisco and the East Bay and a Spanish language version, too. All can be downloaded from our website, or request a free print copy from our office.

Protect Our Native Birds from your Pets – It is much safer for cats and birds when cats stay indoors. Outdoor cats kill an estimated 3.7 billion birds each year in the US alone. Consider installing a catio that benefits both your pet's health and the survival of wild birds. Indoor-only cats are safe from cars, disease, and roaming animals like coyotes and raccoons. Meanwhile, wild native birds can thrive without the threat of additional invasive predators.

Off-leash dogs also threaten birds. GGAS volunteers monitoring Snowy Plovers in San Francisco recorded that dog owners complied



Catio.

with dog-leashing requirements in plover areas less than 30% of the time. Please, always leash your dog in sensitive areas to prevent needless stress or risk for birds.

Just Say No to Plastics – Plastic garbage is a growing threat to aquatic birds. According to a recent UC Davis study, 90% of seabirds have plastic in their guts. We can all be part of the solution by declining straws, eliminating single-use plastics, and advocating for plastic bag and straw bans. You can do even more by joining GGAS for a shoreline cleanup/restoration event.

Take Political Action – Remind your legislators in Congress and in Sacramento that it's the 100th Anniversary of the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Demand that they be steadfast in protecting wildlife from attempts to abolish or weaken laws like the MBTA and the Endangered Species Act.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tax-Advantaged Giving Seminar
Northbrae Church
Berkeley
October 18, 6:30–7 pm

Want to learn about tax-advantaged philanthropy? Join GGAS and a presenter from Merrill Lynch, before our October Speaker Series, to explore your giving goals and to learn easy ways that your charitable giving can benefit you, your family, and the organizations you love.

Fall Native Plant Sale
Miraloma Park Improvement Club
350 O'Shaughnessy Blvd.
San Francisco
Saturday, October 27,
11 am – 4 pm

Purchase plants that will turn your yard into a haven for native birds and visit with GGAS volunteers at the Yerba Buena Chapter of the California Native Plant Society fall plant sale.

Audubon California Assembly
Long Beach, California
November 2 – 4, 2018
Chapter leaders, members, and friends are invited to the Audubon CA Assembly, Nov. 2 - 4 in Long Beach. The weekend offers an opportunity to look outside our local programs and learn from each other. Go to <http://ca.audubon.org/about/chapters/audubon-california-assembly> to register and reserve lodging.

2018 Christmas Bird Counts
Oakland - December 16
San Francisco - December 27
Mark your calendars now! Both counts will be followed by a festive dinner. We welcome all skill levels, beginner to advanced birder. Or count from the comfort of your home as a Feeder Watcher. Registration opens late October. Check our website later this month for details.

SHOREBIRDS CONTINUED from page 1

Shorebirds are marathoners. Just in time, they must acquire all the requisite “biofuel” they need to sustain themselves, and they must be able to rest, too. They are finely tuned by nature to know where, when, and how to seek the essential resources that will sustain each phase of their annual lifecycle. For many species, the place they rely on to rest and refuel is our San Francisco Bay.

Here is some perspective from the scientific community:

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) classified San Francisco Bay as a site of “hemispheric significance for migratory shorebirds,” the highest designation. They estimate that nearly a million individual shorebirds of various species rely on SF Bay for at least some portion of their annual lifecycle. Our Bay holds higher proportions of the total wintering and migratory shorebirds on the U.S. Pacific Coast than any other wetland site. For eleven species, our Bay holds over half of the individual shorebirds detected. (whsrn.org/san-francisco-bay)

In 1999 Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO) published an ambitious three-year study involving 66 census sites on the US Pacific Coast from Canada to Mexico.¹

The results were stunning:

PRBO estimated San Francisco Bay hosts 68% of wintering Western Sandpipers, 38% of wintering Dunlin, 55% of spring migration Black-bellied Plover, 69% of fall migration Least Sandpiper among the three



Verne Nelson

Mixed shorebirds.

For many species, the place they rely on to rest and refuel is our San Francisco Bay.

Pacific coast states. This is hard to imagine, especially when one considers all of the many estuaries and wetlands from Willapa Bay in Washington State south through Mission Bay in San Diego. We have, in our wetland back yard, over half the wintering and migratory shorebirds along 1,500 miles of Pacific Flyway! What can one feel but awe...and perhaps commensurate responsibility?

We have resident shorebirds; a good fraction of the Snowy Plovers, Avocets and Stilts stay and nest here. That Snowy Plover on the beach in Alameda might have hatched in Great Salt Lake, Mono Lake or in Hayward. We have passers-by like Red Knot and Red-necked Phalarope which nest far to the north and winter to the south, who need our tidal zones and salt ponds for refueling along the way. We have pioneers like Black Oystercatcher that have been moving deeper into the Bay for years. And then sadly, Ruddy Turnstone that has done a mysterious disappearing act.

This is not just a diversity of species; it's a diversity of stories. Even closely related

birds that seem so similar can have dramatically different natural histories. Western Sandpipers can filter substrate like little pumps (like tiny baleen whales), but not Least Sandpipers which hunt for invertebrates along stands of Pickleweed. Curlews hunt visually, searching for bubbles in the mud. Dowitchers are tactile probers. Black-bellied Plover are largely nocturnal and have superb night vision. Whimbrels stalk crabs among rocks; Godwits stalk polychaete worms in the mud; Black Turnstones chisel limpids off rip-rap. Wintering shorebirds come to us from places as diverse as the Arctic tundra, mountain tops in Alaska, bogs in Canada's boreal forests, grasslands of Montana, salt flats of Utah and rocky stream courses in the Sierra Nevada.

This diversity is almost too much to take in at once.

And our wetlands are vital. There is no Plan B for these creatures, and there is far too much at stake to not be attentive.

¹Gary Page, Lynne Stenzel, Janet Kjelson, "Overview of Shorebird Abundance and Distribution in Wetlands of the Pacific Coast of the Contiguous United States," *The Condor* Vol. 101(3) (August 1999)



Jerry Ting

Black Turnstones.

DONATIONS

Thank you for joining our donor community.

Donations from May 1, 2018 – August 31, 2018

With gratitude to every individual, business, and organization who made a recent donation. Large or small, the gifts you send support our conservation, education and member programs, and directly benefit the birds you love.

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Please know that we work hard to ensure the accuracy of this list. If your name has been omitted or misspelled, let us know at 510.843.2222.

INTERNATIONAL BIRD RESCUE: WHEN WATERBIRDS ARE IN CRISIS

JD BERGERON

International Bird Rescue (IBR) has become a global leader in responding to man-made disasters affecting wildlife, including oil spills. To date, their response teams have led wildlife rescue efforts in more than 225 spills across six continents. Bird-Rescue's mission is to inspire people to act toward balance with the natural world by rescuing waterbirds in crisis. IBR runs two world-class wildlife centers in California where their team cares for an average of 4,500 animals each year, including pelicans, herons, shorebirds, and other aquatic species. Avian patients are brought in for many reasons, and may be emaciated, dehydrated, ill, injured, and/or orphaned when they arrive. International Bird Rescue believes that 'every bird matters' and rehabilitation is geared to ensure as many birds as possible can be returned to the wild with a viable second chance to survive.

JD brings to his leadership a birder's passion, a childlike delight in Nature, and a deep commitment to solving world challenges in unconventional ways. He has more than 20 years of experience in not-for-profit leadership, international development, and organizational change.

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, October 18
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program



Cindy Margulis

JD releasing a loon.

HABITAT POTENTIAL BIRDING TACTICS

JOSIAH CLARK

When it comes to making every moment count in birding, how one looks is at least as important as where one looks. Drawing on strategies developed for birding Big Days and Christmas Bird Counts, this presentation aims to reveal tactics that will help birders and naturalists improve their methods of coverage and ultimately find more species. We will explore the anatomy of a route, comparing and contrasting different birding methods and styles including skimming vs. digging, and how to allocate time in various habitats when trying to maximize ones species count. This presentation will also focus on important resources that provide for local birds and wildlife and share conservation related information on the limiting factors of vulnerable and declining groups. Josiah aims to help naturalists both find more species and become more informed conservation advocates

Josiah Clark grew up steeped in the natural history of the Bay Area, where he has been birding for more than 20 years. Josiah owns Natures Acres Nursery and Habitat Potential Consulting. Both are dedicated to interpreting, preserving, and creating productive wildlife habitats in the human landscape.

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, November 15
6:30 p.m. refreshments,
7 p.m. program



Josiah Clark

ROSTER

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Audubon engages people to experience the wonder of birds and to translate that wonder into actions which protect native bird populations and their habitats.

ABOUT GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. However, GGAS receives no portion of dues from National Audubon. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office.

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Learn about upcoming Golden Gate Audubon events every month! Send your name and email address to ggass@goldengateaudubon.org to receive our monthly e-newsletters with upcoming events and other news.

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Visit our online store at goldengateaudubon.org/store.

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Design by e.g. communications

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit uusf.org/contact.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: Visit northbrae.org/contact--find-us.html.

www.goldengateaudubon.org

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3 Bay Area HotSpot
Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline
Fall migration is a great time to see waterfowl and shorebirds in this East Bay shoreline.

4 Year of the Bird and Beyond
Lights Out for Fall Migration and other tips on what you can do to protect wild birds this year and every year.

7 Speaker Series
This October, learn about waterbird rescue, rehabilitation, and release efforts by International Bird Rescue.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Sanderlings.

THE BAY IS OUR BACKYARD
BY MAUREEN LAHIFF

Sanderlings are prominent among the shorebirds in our “backyard” in fall and winter. These gregarious, sociable shorebirds are often characterized as “wave chasers” because of their feeding behavior. Their name comes from Old English for “sand ploughman.” Their scientific name *Calidris alba* ends in the Latin adjective for white.

Sanderlings are the palest of our winter “peeps,” with pale gray backs and clear white undersides. Their black carpal “shoulder” patch, when they have it, is distinctive. Their overall patterning, black legs and bill are similar to those of slightly smaller Western Sandpipers. So at a distance, or in difficult light, Sanderlings’ forag-

ing behavior is very helpful in identifying them. When they take off, Sanderlings’ flight feathers are black and they have a narrow but prominent white wing stripe.

In the summer, Sanderlings are circumpolar, nesting on the high-arctic tundra. In North America, they nest in the archipelago islands of Nunavit and the Northwest Territories. In the winter, Sanderlings can be found on sandy beaches on every continent: in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, in tropical and temperate regions. In the winter, Sanderlings are also found on coastal mudflats, such as those of the Bay.

Wintering Sanderlings roost and feed in flocks. Although they will feed alongside other shorebirds, Sanderlings are known to aggressively defend waterline feeding areas.

Sanderlings are fast runners and fast flyers. When a Merlin or a Peregrine Falcon flies overhead, they take off in a compact low-flying flock.

Sanderlings feed both by sight and touch. At the beach, waves loosen the sand so that they can more easily probe for crustaceans that have come near the surface to feed. Their winter diet leads Sanderlings to cast pellets composed of compressed sand and bits of shell. (Bet you thought only raptors cast pellets!)

Sanderlings pair up in the breeding grounds. Pairs often cooperate in incubating 3 to 4 eggs and caring for the young. Some female Sanderlings are polyandrous. They leave their first clutch of eggs for the father to incubate and raise and mate with another male. The female incubates and raises the second brood.

As winter beach dwellers, these global travelers and long-distant migrants need our protection as well as our appreciation.